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STATEMENT OF CANADIAN WELFARE COUNCIL

PRESENTED TO

CANADIAN LEGION HOUSING CONFERENCE IN TORONTO

JUNE 26-27, 1953

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Since its establishment in 1920 the Canadian Welfare Council has had a direct interest in the housing needs of Canadians as these affect the health, welfare and happiness of family living. The Council's general interest in housing was aroused to specific action in the years following World War II because of the widespread hardships experienced as a result of the acute housing shortage emanating from the depression and war, a temporary shortage of building materials and a sharp rise in building costs. The Canadian Welfare Council has an interest in adequate housing of all kinds for Canadian families, although it is particularly interested in public housing for low-income people. This statement is necessarily brief and will therefore deal in the main with public housing.

Many of the principles enunciated in a pamphlet published by the Canadian Welfare Council in 1947 as its official policy, A NATIONAL HOUSING POLICY FOR CANADA, are still valid today. However, recognition should be given to the very substantial progress in legislation which has been made since that time, notably through the 1949 amendment to the National Housing Act. This provided a new Section to the Act (35), which permits the development of subsidized public housing, 75 percent of the cost of which is absorbed by the Federal Government. Enabling provincial legislation has since been passed across Canada, generally providing for local initiative in determining the need and developing a local program for subsidized housing and setting out the sharing of the remaining 25 percent of the cost between a province and its municipalities.

It has been firmly established that nearly half of urban dwellers live in rental housing and that at least one third of the nation's wage earners do not earn sufficiently to either own or rent adequate housing without some type of public subsidy. Section 35 of the National Housing Act has now made it possible to meet this need.

Progress in this respect has been disappointingly slow since 1949, although there is evidence that during the past year or two many more cities and provinces are developing subsidized housing projects under this legislation.

There are probably three major reasons for slow progress, each of which should receive the attention of this national conference on housing:

- 1) Lack of Information: Large sections of the public are still unaware of the serious housing needs of low income people. Local rate payers who must provide some part of the costs, are not familiar with the legislative provisions or are otherwise fearful of public housing. We need a systematic and intensive documenting of the housing needs of low income families in communities across Canada, under the local leadership of welfare or citizen councils, with direction and assistance from a national movement representative of the Canadian Legion, The Community Planning Association of Canada, and other interested organizations. Alongside of the identification of need should go an educational campaign on what public housing is and how it can be obtained under existing legislation.
- 2) Ownership of Projects: The nature of the cooperative arrangement under section 35 which places the municipality in a distinctly junior position is undoubtedly another contributing factor to the slow progress experienced. The ownership of government-assisted projects is retained by the federal-provincial partnership, with merely a management agency set up locally to handle a particular undertaking that has been approved. Countries like Great Britain and the United States have followed what appears to be the wiser policy of separating ownership and subsidy. In these countries the municipality is entrusted with the ownership of whatever public housing is constructed in its area and it applies to the senior levels of government for the necessary subsidy. An amendment to the National Housing Act which would permit such an arrangement in Canada would be a progressive step and one which should be considered seriously by this Conference.
- 3) Finance: The cost to municipalities of any kind of housing development is undoubtedly an important factor which makes for limited progress. While it is true that under section 35 most of the financial burden is carried by the Federal Government and the provinces, there still remains the expense for services, such as schools, sewage trunk lines and water mains, which is considerable in the case of a new area and may be beyond the means of smaller communities.

This cost factor is one which is related to the whole problem of financing government and is beyond the competence of the Canadian Welfare Council. However, insofar as it bears on the housing problem, it merits the attention of this Conference. The problem emanates from the narrow, predominantly property base for financing a wide variety of costly municipal services. Consideration

needs to be given to ways of increasing municipal revenues, or if this is not possible, transferring some of their responsibilities to the senior levels of government.

The Canadian Welfare Council is also interested in the more widespread provision of economic low-rent housing for another important part of the population which cannot afford to own homes but which could pay its own way if more modestly priced rental housing were made available through the combined efforts of private and public enterprise.

The conference should also give consideration to more effective methods of constructing, merchandising and financing with a view to reducing the capital and maintenance costs of homes. Equally important however, is the need to draw greater attention to the desirability of adequate family accommodation as a legitimate and essential family expenditure. The human values emanating from adequate family accommodation and its place in the family budget as a priority expenditure need more emphasis.

June 30, 1953.